

Popular strip of shoreline a mixed blessing

DUXBURY — Each summer weekend thousands of sunbathers flock to a seven-mile long strip of sand in Duxbury Bay. Many consider Duxbury Beach to be one of New England's best.

But the constant trampling by the crowds has been a mixed blessing, as beach owners and the town struggle to maintain the fragile environment while keeping the beach open to as many people as possible.

"In recent years, major ecological efforts to save the beach have begun," said Margaret Kearney, a member of the beach study committee. "We have been rebuilding dunes

by planting grass and putting up snow fencing.

"But, we all work with the full knowledge that a storm could come along and obliterate all our efforts. If that beach is not preserved, a storm would come along that would wipe it out."

The beach attracts people from as far as 50 miles away for swimming, picnicking, bird watching and walking. Others use the bay for boating and fishing. The protected bay is one of a few that has remained clean enough that its shores can be used for shellfishing.

Although use of the beach

increases each year, the reservation's mission to maintain the beach as a recreational haven for town residents and the general public has been a struggle since it bought the beach 68 years ago, said its president, Bartlett Bradley.

In the 19th century the beach was privately owned. After the Powder Point Bridge was completed in 1892, citizens became concerned about plans to develop the beach into tiny lots for summer cottages. Many also had feared an amusement park would be built.

Although the storm of 1889 had leveled the beach and delayed development, three large cottages were built near High Pines by the Wright family, who owned most of the beach. Citizens' objections to its development remained strong.

In 1919 the estate of Georgianna B. Wright put the beach up for sale, and 20 citizens bought it in the name of the Duxbury Beach Association, now called the Duxbury Beach Reservation.

About 18 shacks and three large shooting stands that were on the property have since been destroyed or moved.

During the next 50 years, the reservation, with the help of town residents, would successfully defeat four attempts by the state to usurp control of the beach.

The first attempt came in 1928 when the state Legislature filed a bill to take over the beach. In 1950, the

Popular strip of shoreline a mixed blessing

■ BEACH

Continued from Page 6

legislative Committee on Harbors and Public Lands recommended that the state acquire all barrier beaches. In 1958 a bill was filed that would have given control of the beach to the state Department of Natural Resources. Again, in 1968, the Massachusetts Area Planning Council recommended that the state acquire Duxbury Beach.

"It's been very quiet for about 20 years now, but the threat still exists," Bradley said. "But if we keep the thing wide open, it probably won't happen."

The beach has long been popular as a summer retreat. By the late 1920s, hundreds of cars jammed the bridge and surrounding streets.

Despite the usual problems of maintaining a public beach, the town, which leases the beach, and the reservation have maintained a good relationship.

In 1931, the town voted to forbid parking on Gurnet Bridge and adjacent Powder Point streets and to require the reservation to open a small parking lot by the bridge for Duxbury residents and a large parking space at the northern end of beach for the general public. The town agreed to pay for police patrols

of the beach.

Today, a beach study committee continues to work on solving problems.

Besides its recreational uses the beach also protects the town from storms coming off the ocean.

The beach has tended to move westward over the years, and storms have caused the water to wash over the beach, leveling it. The beach has broken in several places and the reservation must fill the breaks with rocks and sand, Bradley said.

Despite that, Bradley said there have been few noticeable changes in the beach during the past 30 years that he has been a trustee.